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ABSTRACT

The analysis of the planning for an implementation of an alternative high school in a large urban school system is the focus of this study. Interview data are used. This investigation draws on, and compliments, the previous literature on implementation. While most of the earlier studies look at failures, this one is based on an instance of successful implementation. The study identifies four factors that may account for successful implementation, the intent being to partially account for that success and to provide some clues to what program administrators can do to make it more likely that new programs will get fair trials in the schools. The school was formed from the top-down providing legitimacy within the larger system and a measure of homogeneity. A large amount of lead time allows the faculty to develop personal ties and to share goals and values pertaining to the new school. Staff commitment to the school is fostered by mutual shaping by principal and teachers. Internal and external harmony is facilitated by stacking-the-deck. The strategy utilized by City Wide High School also has some negative features. The approach seems to reduce the chances for dissemination of the innovation within the school system. The large amount of lead time and the stacked deck, in particular, cannot be duplicated every time. Despite its shortcomings, City Wide High provides an alternative, and it is surviving. (Author/AM)

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The Design and Implementation of an Alternative High School

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This study is the analysis of the planning for, and implementation of, an alternative high school in a large urban school system. Interview data are used. The study identifies four factors that may account for "successful" implementation. The school was formed from the top-down providing legitimacy within the larger system and a measure of homogeneity. A large amount of lead time allowed the faculty to develop personal ties and to share goals and values pertaining to the new school. Staff commitment to the school was fostered by mutual shaping by principal and teachers. Internal and external harmony was facilitated by stacking-the-deck.

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> Time and again I have observed the creation of settings (usually in the human service area) with whose basic values and aims it would be hard to disagree, only to see over time how optimism is replaced by pessimism, consensus by polarization and passionate concern for values by a desire to exist. (Sarason, 1972, p. 20)

The problem indicated by Sarason is particularly acute in education where a commitment to "change" and "innovation" has produced wave after wave of new programs for schools. For one reason or another, however, many of these programs never seem to fulfill the promises they initially hold forth. Some are over ambitious, of course, and could never deliver what they promise. But others never get the chance to be adequately tested--they are never implemented as the proposals specify.

Within the last four or five years researchers have begun to document the difficulties associated with the implementation of new programs or the creation of new settings. For the most part, these studies have focused on reasons why innovative schools or school programs have failed. Representative of such studies are those by Charters and Pellegrin (1972), Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein (1971), Reynolds (1973) and Smith and Keith (1971). These studies, and others, have identified a number of hindrances to successful implementation: abstract or overly ambitious objectives, the failure to incorporate user input into goal formulation, a tendency to avoid detailed planning, inadequate resources, a failure to appreciate the difficulty of learning new roles, management's failure to help staff deal with the problems of implementation, difficulties of maintaining motivation during the trials of implementation and ineffective monitoring and feedback mechanisms.

This study draws on, and complements, the previous literature on implementation. While most of the earlier studies looked at "failures," however, this one is based on what I consider to be an instance of "successful" implementation. The intent is to account (in part) for that "success" and to

provide some clues to what program administrators can do to make it more likely that new programs will get fair trials in the schools. The "results" of this study are in the form of concepts and hypotheses. Their tentativeness needs to be emphasized.

City-Wide High School

City-Wide High School is an alternative school in a large urban school system (city population, 750,000). City-Wide is a "school-without-walls" patterned after Philadelphia's Parkway program and Chicago's Metro High School.

> The purpose of this new high school is to provide an alternative educational opportunity for those secondary students who are dissatisfied with the traditional school program. The school will have a special appeal for the student who is seeking a maximum degree of flexibility in his studies, active participation in decisions involving his education and responsibility for his own education. (Pre-opening brochure)

With a staff consisting of a director (principal), a counselor and seven full-time teachers, City-Wide opened its doors to 112 students in September, 1972. As part of an "outside" evaluation, I spent an average of one day per week at the school during its first year. I observed classes, "shadowed" students and teachers, sat in the lounge, gave students rides to their classes around the city, sat in on faculty meetings, helped in the math lab and chaperoned parties at the school. Since that period of extensive and intensive involvement, I have maintained contact with students and teachers and have periodically visited the school. In the process I have accumulated a large quantity of observational and interview notes about the school as a social system and as an innovation. To provide a "feel" for City-Wide I will present two aspects of the school that I included in the original evaluation report (dated May, 1973).

In order to take advantage of the resources of the city, the school operates on a modified modular schedule. The typical high school's 45 or 50 minute periods five times per week would not be practical given the amount of travel a student may have to do. Consequently, some classes meet on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for one hour and fifteen minutes. Others meet on Monday and Friday or on Tuesday and Thursday for two hours. At least one-half hour separates all class periods. Wednesday afternoons are reserved for Counseling Groups, an all-school meeting and committee meetings. Each student is responsible for two hours of community service per week for which credit is given. In addition, City-Wide uses a 12-month school year: four 10-week school/3-week vacation quarters. The faculty felt that there would be resources available in the summer that would make a twelve month school year beneficial. "Getting out" to use the city's resources, therefore, necessitated these structural arrangements.

"Getting out" into the city underscores a student's personal responsibility for his/her education. The temptation to "cut" is magnified. Also, the student is more open to the public's view as he/she moves about the city and uses public and private facilities. More than one student commented that "it's really hard to be on your best behavior so much of the time." At the same time, "getting out" serves to reduce boredom and to keep enthusiasm fairly high. Leaving the City-Wide center and moving about the city, in itself, breaks into the routine of an ordinary school day. The three-week mini-vacations are appreciated by staff and students. The staff has a chance to slow down; students get a needed break: "I knew I only had to put out for ten weeks. It's hard getting back now but I think I can make it 'til Christmas." Figure 1 recapitulates this brief discussion.

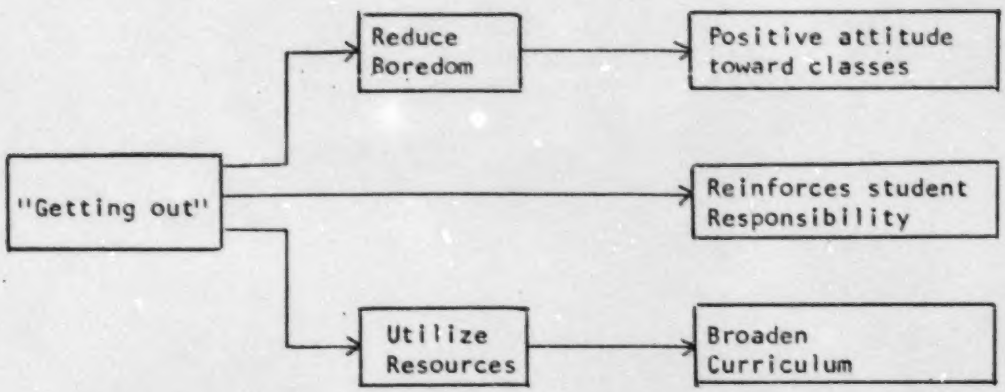

Figure 1: The effects of "getting out"

"Persons who interact frequently with one another tend to like one another," George Homans (1950) hypothesized, adding five pages later, "only if authority is not one of the 'other things' and does not enter the situation being considered" (pp. 111 & 116). The interaction of City-Wide faculty and students, and the place of authority in this interaction will be considered in the next few paragraphs.

The pupil/teacher ratio at City-Wide is somewhat lower than 14/1. Class size is small by any standards and certainly smaller than the 40 students per class still found in some of the city's high schools. This in itself serves to increase teacher-student interaction. Further, a couple of the teachers have almost totally individualized their classes while others have elements of individualization. There is also a provision for students to earn credit for independent study--apart from any formally organized class. The net result is increased interaction between teachers and students.

But there is more than just classroom interaction--and here the

"authority" element in the relationship is less than that shown in the classroom. The half-hour periods between classes are conducive to formal and informal interaction: help with an assignment or a game of ping-pong. Teacher and student may eat lunch together at a Burger Chef or buy a sandwich from the "meatwagon"--the catering truck that pulls into the school yard at lunch time.

Two other informal sources of interaction are also important: teachers give students rides to and from classes away from City-Wide center and the core faculty members double as P. E. teachers. For whatever reason (and it probably has something to do with the activity itself) coaches and P. E. teachers have, or can have, a different relationship to the students in their classes. The City-Wide arrangement takes advantage of this by combining in one person the teaching of the regular subjects and the teaching of P. E. City-Wide uses the term recreation for its P. E. program and includes such activities as bowling and slim gym along with the more traditional volleyball and swimming. It can be noted in passing that there has never been segregation by sex in the recreation classes.

Further reducing the "authority" element in the teacher-student relationship is the freedom accorded students in the "expressive realm." The term comes from Etzioni (1961): activities in the expressive realm (related to personal concerns) are contrasted with "activities in the instrumental realm" (related to the official functions of the organization.) Absences are recorded and reported and the principal will remind a student to watch his language when parents are around but students <u>can</u> smoke, eat and drink in the classroom, young men can wear their hats if they choose, vulgarity is generally tolerated, and students can leave a classroom without permission if they need to use the washroom or just get a coke. All these things serve to diminish the scope of the authority usually granted to a classroom teacher.

The result of the increased interaction and the decreased authority element is an increased liking for teachers by students and for students by teachers. "Liking" is inferred from lack of trouble caused teachers (or students), a general respect, a willingness to go along with teachers (or students) and the general tone of friendliness in the school. Figure 2 is an attempt to capture these elements in schematic form.

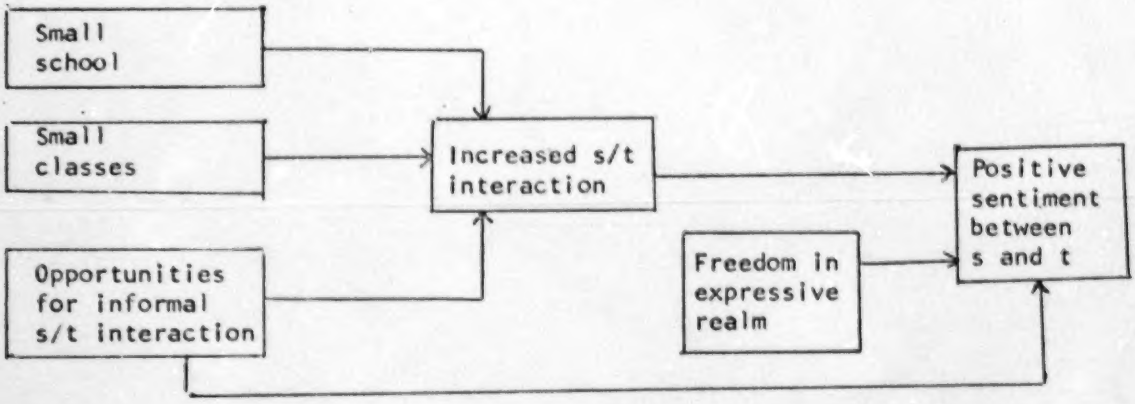

Figure 2: The antecedents of positive sentiment between students & teachers

Factors contributing to successful implementation

Now in the middle of its fourth year of operation, City-Wide appears to be going strong. Five of the original staff members are still there, the school has survived severe system-wide budget cuts, independent observers attest that the students seem to be interacting and learning in a humane and educationally stimulating atmosphere and the students and their parents are enthusiastic about the school. Written comments from three parents at the most recent Family Night (November 25, 1975) are illustrative:

> I think City-Wide is mostly great! It is a place where my children have felt comfortable, enjoyed having the responsibility of being on their own, as well as having an opportunity to relate personally with adult teachers.

> I like City-Wide because of the closer relationship between student and teacher. The student gets more personalized attention and counseling. This is very good Parents are also alerted to any discipline problems, poor grades in enough time for parent-child counseling. The staff at City-Wide is very responsive and concerned. The one thing I'm apprehensive about at City-Wide is the permissiveness.
>
> I am very excited and pleased about the concept and the fact of City-Wide High. Several very adult responses are cultivated here. Independence in choice of studies as well as autonomy in carry-through is stressed. It is refreshing to see teen-agers treated as people. Our son gets more from school in less total time at school. The classes are oriented toward educating kids to live in the business world--comfortably and happily.

The thesis of this paper is that City-Wide's "success" is attributable (in part) to the way the program was planned and the way the innovation was launched. This will be the subject of the remainder of the paper.

City-Wide High School was launched when the superintendent of schools appointed a director of Project: Alternative at the start of the 1971-72 school year. The director's mandate during the first semester of that year was to become familiar with the alternative school "movement," to design the essential elements of the new program and to select a staff for the school. During that first semester, then, the director selected a core of eight teachers, relying on the recommendations of supervisors, principals and assistant principals. These eight were assigned to work full-time for Project: Alternative during the second semester of the 1971-72 school year. Beginning in January, the staff visited alternative schools in Philadelphia, New York and Chicago, attended workshops, planned the program in greater detail and wrote curricula for their own subject matter specialities.

In the spring, the staff went to each of the city's high schools and, in an assembly of eleventh graders, explained the City-Wide concept and

recruited volunteers for the school which was to begin in September. Each of these volunteers was screened on his/her attendance record, on grades and sometimes on counselors' recommendations. City Wide's first student body represented each of the city's regular high schools--split equally by race and almost equally by sex (there were more female students). Of the 112 students, thirteen were sophomores, five were seniors and the remainder were juniors.

The announced policy was to screen out any students with more than two "unmade-up F's." Actually, the student body that began in September, 1972 was more select than that. If IQ scores mean anything at all, the mean IQ of 113 seems to indicate a group that is quite able academically. Reinforcing the academic bias was the inclusion of the thirteen sophomores in the original City-Wide group. The only sophomores even considered had to be from the honors or "A track" during their freshman year.

Additional screening of students was done on attendance records to eliminate any students with a history of chronic absenteeism. Since students were to be given responsibility to get to classes in different parts of the city, it was reasoned that only those who had previously attended school on a regular basis would be "good risks." Inquiries were made with counselors in some instances. The total process of student selection at City-Wide can be captured in the phrase "stacking the deck." In a sense, the teacher selection process was also an instance of "stacking the deck."

This brief account of the year prior to the opening of school points to a number of interesting features associated with the beginnings of City-Wide High School. One such feature is that City-Wide was <u>formed from the top-down</u>. The school took shape from superintendent to director to teachers to students. Indeed, the superintendent chose the director, the director chose the staff, and

the staff (with the director) chose the students. This approach can be contrasted to that in which a group of students and/or teachers clamor for an alternative school and shape its design from the beginning. It can be contrasted further with those alternative schools that choose students by lottery from the entire high school population in a city.

Although City-Wide was formed from the top-down it must be emphasized that the innovation was not handed down from above, fully developed. As Janssen (1974) notes, "for the teachers, students and administrators involved, alternatives handed down from above can be bitterly disappointing. Given carte blanche to experiment, people too often formulate grandiose plans" (p. 21). This did not happen at City-Wide. The principal had a full year to develop plans; the teachers were involved for a semester.

One consequence of the top-down formation is a measure of homogeneity that results in greater commitment to the emerging enterprise than would be possible if the participants were more heterogeneous. The top-down formation process improves the chances that the eventual participants in the new endeavor will share the same goals and values--at least those goals and values relevant to the joint endeavor. According to Cooper (1973), "schools with lower disparity among member goals (and stronger outside support) will stand a better chance of survival" (p. 504).

The homogeneity of the staff was fostered by the process used for their selection. City-Wide's director sought recommendations from the administrators of the city's high schools and from subject matter supervisors. All the teachers are veterans of quite a few years in the city system, several having been recognized for their teaching ability. All are definitely academically oriented. None are the "brown-rice and mushrooms type," to use Jonathan Kozol's

phrase. For example, one teacher had been a high school department chairperson and had been a member of the team that wrote the math curriculum for the city high schools. Another had written and piloted a science course for the system. All are definitely "company men" (if that term can be used non-perjoratively and non-sexist-ly) so a certain amount of like-mindedness was present from the start. The staff selection process, then, tended to bring together a homogeneous group for the City-Wide sub-system. In addition, the process assured some homogeneity between the sub-system and the larger school system. While teachers compatible with an alternative school were sought, the method chosen to recruit them probably made sure they would not be "too far out." The antagonisms between the "regular" schools (and their faculties) and City-Wide (and its staff), although not entirely absent, have been kept to a minimum.

Another feature indicated in the account of the school's beginnings was the amount of lead time prior to the actual opening of school in September, 1972. Although some of the staff's activities were funded with a small foundation grant, the release of eight or nine persons for a full semester must be seen as a significant commitment on the part of the school system to the new enterprise. The semester prior to the school's opening also provided an extensive period for planning. In contrast, in his account of the "Short, Happy Life of Adams-Morgan Community School Project," Lauter (1968) cites a general feeling of "let's get started and we'll find out just what we're doing as we go along" (p. 237). An overwhelming urgency to put the Adams-Morgan project into operation "immediately or sooner" led to a rejection of the idea of a year of planning or for starting with a smaller experiment. Along with the planning, the workshops and trips undertaken by the City-Wide staff during the semester provided a "period of togetherness" for the staff that led to the development of personal ties as well as to a greater sharing of goals and values pertaining to the new school. The

personal ties between faculty members, incidentally, were clearly evident to the students and were commented on by them on numerous occasions.

The large amount of lead time provided an active role for the users of the innovation (i.e., the teachers) during the implementation process. In contrast, Fullan's (1972) analysis of five case studies of innovations concluded that the modal process of change is one in which innovations are developed external to schools and then transmitted to them with no concern for the values and capabilities of the users or for the fact that changes in user roles will be necessary. The results for those innovations were disastrous. Although City-Wide was formed from the top-down, no finalized plan was imposed on the teachers. Given the almost complete lack of detailed plans at the time the staff was selected, the faculty had a unique opportunity to mold City-Wide to its own inclinations. There were the usual ideological and inter-personal clashes, of course, but over the course of the semester a final plan evolved with which all could live and to which all could be strongly committed. Initially, for example, one teacher (the oldest member of the faculty) felt that she could not work with the rest of the group, which she perceived as too "radical." She became convinced that she had been "assigned" as a "balance" of sorts, to keep the faculty from going overboard. She found the tension severe at first but over the long period of being together and working together she found her ideas and those of the other staff members moved closer together. The weekly City-Wide faculty meetings can be viewed as an extension of the semester's work prior to the opening of the school. Personal ties are strengthened and the shape of City-Wide is continually formed.

Unlike the teachers, the students were presented with a definite structure, which they could buy into or not depending on their preferences. Once in, the

students were given almost complete freedom in the expressive realm, and the all school meeting and its various committees allowed them a voice in everything from the time schedule of classes to the evaluation of teachers. Clearly, however, the student-users were not involved in the creation of City-Wide to the extent that the teachers were. The involvement of parents was similar to that of the students. They had to approve the enrollment of their children in the new school but their input was not actively sought until the school year was underway.

To summarize to this point: the top-down formation and the staff selection procedures contributed to a homogeneous faculty for City-Wide. This homogeneity, plus the large amount of lead time, facilitated the joint planning that took place in the semester prior to the opening of school. The joint planning reinforced the norms that the staff members already shared, and provided the context for the formation of norms concerning other aspects of the new endeavor. In effect, the new school was "mutually shaped" by the director and the staff. The mutual shaping led, in turn, to rather close personal ties between staff members and to a strong commitment to City-Wide on their part. Finally, the total process did not seem to hinder, and probably facilitated, the incorporation of more heterogeneous inputs from students and parents as the school year progressed. As Etzioni (1966) points out in his analysis of the birth of the European Economic Community (Common Market), "once a union is established, its institutions molded, and its image crystallized, it can absorb more countries and withstand more heterogeneity than when it is being initiated" (p. 60). Figure 3 is a schematic diagram of this summary.

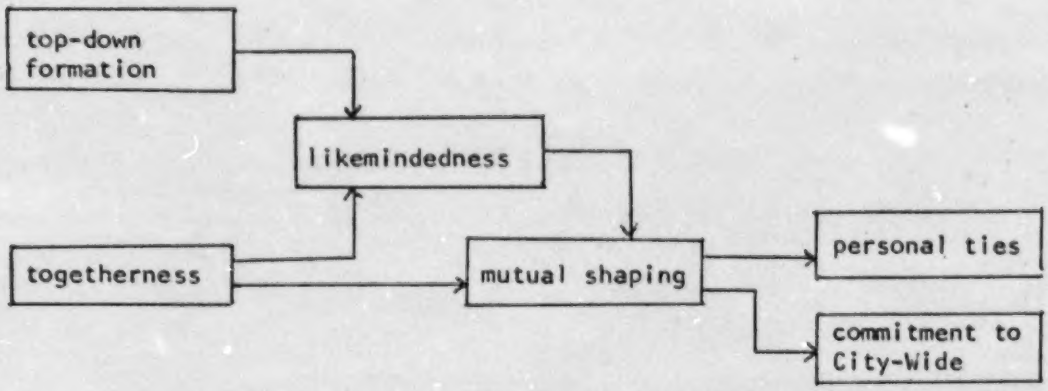

Figure 3: The involvement of staff in City-Wide planning

The change strategy utilized in the setting up of City-Wide High School was characterized by a cautious top-down formation that facilitated involving the teacher-user in program planning and that guaranteed a "stacked deck." In the remaining paragraphs I will look at the consequences of this change strategy.

The original homogeneity of the staff and student body (resulting from the selection process) served to reduce the dissension that is almost inevitable in a new enterprise like City-Wide. The evidence is still visible, both in the absence of overt hostility and in more positive manifestations of cooperation among students and teachers. Although Black and White students tend to go their separate ways, there is genuinely good rapport between the races. While there is something of an us/them feeling between "oldtimers" and the newcomers at the start of a new school year, a permanent split does not seem to develop. A four-day camping trip early in the school year helps to mold the new enlarged community. All of the original teachers remained at the school through the first two years; five of the original full time staff of nine, including the principal, are still at City-Wide in the 1975-76 school year. Replacements are hand-picked; in one case, a part-time teacher became a full-time staff member.

In an analogous manner, there has been relatively little overt distrust of City-Wide on the part of the school system or the larger community. The school has consciously maintained a rather low profile throughout its existence which has helped it avoid hassles with the environment. Students are conscious of public opinion and have frequently mentioned that they are on "good behavior" when in the city so as not to jeopardize the school's future. Implicitly, City-Wide is saying that it is better than the regular high schools. In addition, City-Wide teachers appear to have a very favorable work load in terms of student-teacher ratio. There is also some feeling that City-Wide has siphoned off a number of the "better" students from the other schools. But there have been no out-right attacks on the school, partly because of the low-profile strategy and, in my opinion, partly because the staff is not substantially different from the other high school teachers in the city.

With regard to relationships with the total system, Sarason's (1972) words are instructive.

> ...a proposed new setting always arises in some relation to existing settings; that there are characteristics of the new setting (such as superiority of mission) and concerns of the existing ones (such as ideology, concern for resources) which ensure some conflict and competition.... (p. 46)

Sarason's reminder cuts both ways. If an innovative setting is to be truly different from existing ones, great care must be taken to cut the cords that unite them. On the other hand, the ties will never be completely severed. The new setting is at the mercy of the existing settings and, as in the case of City-Wide, does well to insure that its existence is not terminated before it develops a life of its own.

The strategy utilized by City-Wide also has some negative features. The approach seems to reduce the chances for dissemination of the innovation within

the school system. The large amount of lead time and the "stacked deck," in particular, cannot be duplicated every time. There is also the question of whether the City-Wide concept is applicable to other student populations or mixes of students. This is no small concern in the context of public education. In this regard, the school opens itself to charges of elitism which can feed into any latent distrust of the new school. Figure 4 recapitulates this discussion.

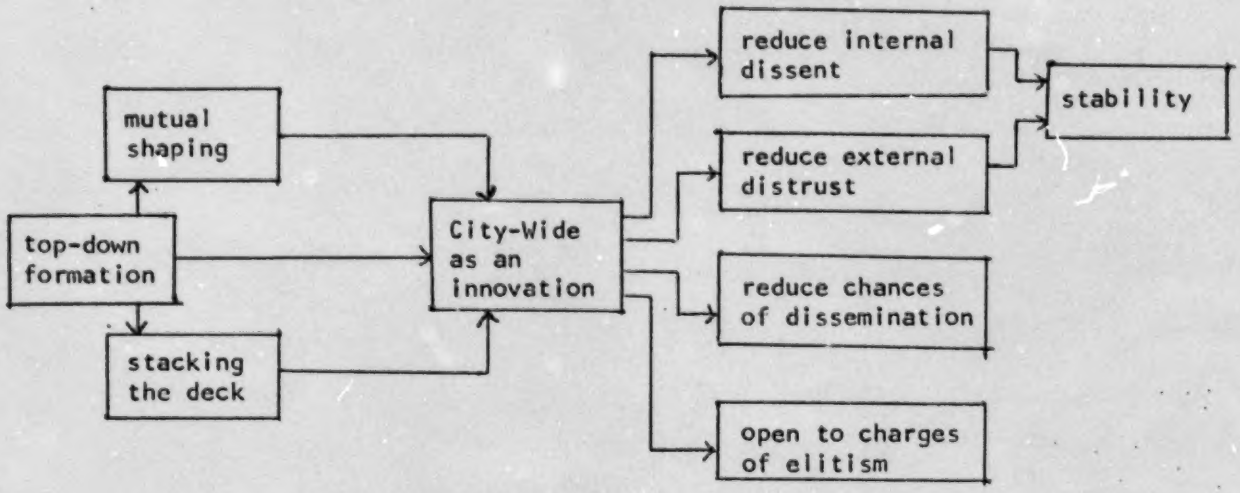

Figure 4: City-Wide as an innovation

Despite its shortcomings as an alternative school (which have not been emphasized here) and despite its drawbacks as a model for change, City-Wide High School does provide a genuine alternative form of secondary education in the city. And it is surviving. Smith and Keith (1971), in their analysis of the quick collapse of the innovative Kensington School, place much of the blame for that collapse on an "alternative of grandeur" change strategy. Those responsible made a clean sweep of the old and introduced the new throughout the system, attempting to change persons, interactions, programs and structures simultaneously.

The alternative of grandeur is a high risk change strategy with the potential for large payoffs--or complete disaster, as in the Kensington case. The authors conclude that perhaps a "gradualist strategy" (Etzioni, 1966) would be a more viable approach to innovation. Based on the case of City-Wide, I would have to agree.

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